

**“Bad Seed or Bad Soil”: The Influence of Dark Personality and Exposure to Violence on  
Offending in Justice-Involved Youth**

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### **Abstract**

Increasing awareness of the prevalence of exposure to violence in justice-involved youth has raised questions about the myriad factors that predict offending behavior. While many studies have identified exposure to violence as an important precursor to violent offending, few studies have explored the mechanisms explaining this relationship. The present research investigates the mediating effect of malevolent or “dark” personality traits on the relationship between exposure to violence and two types of offending behavior (violent and nonviolent). Data from the Pathways to Desistance project, a longitudinal study of 1,354 adjudicated youth, was used to test both models. Regression analyses confirmed the mediating role of dark personality in the exposure to violence to offending association. Implications for juvenile justice proceedings, rehabilitation, and future research are discussed.

*Keywords:* exposure to violence, antisocial behavior, juvenile offending, dark personality, trauma

**“Bad Seed or Bad Soil”: The Influence of Dark Personality Traits and Exposure to Violence on Offending in Justice-Involved Youth**

Juvenile offending is an increasing cause of concern in the United States. In 2018, approximately 1.6 million crimes were committed by youth under the age of 21 (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2019). While the severity of offending varies, criminal involvement is detrimental to young people and society as a whole. Indeed, juvenile offenders are much more likely to reoffend than adults, necessitating examination of factors that underlie this particular type of antisocial behavior to elucidate potential points for ameliorating interventions (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015).

Juvenile justice researchers have highlighted the overwhelming prevalence of exposure to violence within the juvenile offender population (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Traumatic events like exposure to violence have been collectively referred to as “adverse childhood experiences” (ACEs) and several studies (c.f., Anda et al., 2010; Hagan et al., 2015; Vitopoulos et al., 2018; Dye, 2018) demonstrate the positive association between ACEs association negative outcomes (e.g., poorer health, recidivism, psychopathology). Increased ACEs in juvenile offenders increases their likelihood to become serious, violent, and chronic youth offenders (SVC), a term coined to describe youth offenders whose crimes are especially detrimental to society (Fox et al., 2015). As a result, exposure to trauma - violence in particular - has been clearly and repeatedly identified as a powerful, but complex, predictor of criminal behavior whose functional mechanism likely depends on myriad other factors.

The link between socially aversive personality traits and antisocial behaviors supports the notion that stable personality characteristics can influence an individual’s likelihood to

offend. Pauslus and Williams (2002) proposed a “Dark Triad” (DT) of personality to distinguish the most prevalent malevolent personality traits. The DT consists of three distinct, but correlated constructs: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. Higher levels of these traits are characterized by, and predict, antisocial behaviors like manipulation, dishonesty, and duplicitousness (Furnham et al., 2013). Other studies have proposed that each of these traits stem from an antagonistic latent Dark Core, “D”, hence their strong correlations and shared variance (Moshagen et al., 2018; Vize et al., 2020). Regardless of its operationalization, dark personality traits may be a potential mechanism through which exposure to violence is associated with offending behavior. My research tests two mediation models to determine whether dark personality mediates the relation between exposure to violence and violent and nonviolent offending behavior.

### **Exposure to Violence and Offending Behavior**

Exposure to violence is a common phenomenon among youth in the United States. A recent national survey of youth under age 17 found that 67.5% of respondents had experienced at least one form of indirect (i.e., witnessed) or direct (i.e., victimized) violence. Half of these respondents reported exposure to more than one violent event. Experiencing any form of violence was also linked to future exposure to other types of violence (Finkelhor et al., 2015) and exposure to violence, whether direct or indirect, confers a greater cumulative risk for future offending in juveniles (Zimmerman & Posick, 2016; Farrell & Zimmerman, 2017). This recurring and cyclical pattern of violence suggests that exposure to violence may play a causal role in the prevalence of violence these individuals commit and reexperience.

The dynamic relationship between exposure to violence and offending behavior is well-established. Farrell and Zimmerman (2018) determined that various dimensions of delinquent behavior in youth (e.g., substance use, property crime, violent offending) are persistently influenced by exposure to violence. They concluded that the effects of exposure to violence can be more or less proximal dependent on the type offense such that acute effects were more commonly seen in property crime and substance use. More severe violent crimes have been associated with a greater number of ACEs, necessitating exploration of how the compounding of these episodes of violence exposure influence youth offending propensity (Fox et al., 2015; Farrell & Zimmerman, 2017).

Individual differences (i.e., personality traits) have long been considered as a determinant of behavioral outcomes by criminological and personality theorists, alike (Shweder, 1975; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) describes the development of personality as an agentic, adaptive response to environmental stimuli. During childhood and adolescence, individuals typically exhibit less agency, placing them at greater susceptibility to life experiences. These experiences, along with other biopsychosocial factors, continuously shape the content of personality over time. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) further contributes to this logic by highlighting the interactive influence of individual experiences on the relationship they develop with society at large. Both social cognitive theory and ecological systems theory offer explanations of how life experiences systematically influence development and, ultimately, future behavior.

## **Dark Personality**

Paulhus and Williams' (2002) proposed a "Dark Triad" (DT) of Personality consisting of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, as specific malevolent personality traits existing along a continuum within both forensic and subclinical populations. Narcissism refers to an inflated sense of self-importance, characterized by grandiosity and egocentrism that negatively influences interpersonal relationships (Campbell & Green, 2008). Machiavellianism encompasses the manipulative dimension of dark personality, distinguished by low morality and an emphasis on both self-interests and personal rewards (Jones & Paulhus, 2009). Psychopathy characterizes those with uninhibited antisocial behavior who display a lack of empathy or remorse for these actions (Hare, 1998). These highly correlated but separate traits have been consistently, but differentially, associated with antisocial behavior (Asscher et al., 2011; Lau & Marsee, 2012; Flexon et al., 2016; Muris et al., 2017).

Due to their intercorrelated nature, recent literature has compared the utility of operationalizing dark personality as a single latent core, "D", rather than the three distinct constructs of the DT. This conceptualization appreciates the variance in negative personality traits by focusing on their underlying tendency toward antisocial or morally questionable behaviors (Moshagen et al., 2018). This "D" factor's operationalization has not been definitively decided, but typically utilizes similar components of the DT such as psychopathy, Machiavellianism, narcissism, morality, etc. Further studies highlight how the underlying differences of the DT are largely predominated by their similarities, supporting the plausible existence of a unifying construct that accounts for their respective influences on personality and behavior (Jones & Figueredo, 2012; Volmer et al., 2019; Vize et al., 2020). Not only does this

approach offer a more parsimonious explanation, Zettler et al. (2020) found it to be a more stable longitudinal predictor than the DT.

### **The Mediating Effect of Dark Personality**

Negative experiences play a particularly crucial role in the consequential malevolent personality traits that can manifest later in life. This emphasizes an urgency in understanding how personality traits emerge in response to traumatic experiences. Various forms of trauma (psychological, physical, or emotional) have been linked to the onset of personality disorders and antagonistic personality traits (de Carvalho et al., 2015; Siegel et al., 2019). Recently, Siegel and colleagues (2019) noted a distorted conception of harm in individuals with a history of violence exposure. Misunderstanding of harm was found to impede the development of prosocial relationships, similar to the antisocial outcomes seen in Paulhus and Williams' (2002) "Dark Triad". Overall, exposure to violence confers greater risk of maladaptive personality development, which may manifest as dark personality traits.

Empirically understanding how these dark traits relate to offending has been nuanced. Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) contended that all forms of crime and delinquency could be explained solely by low self-control. Flexon and colleagues (2016) challenged this "spuriousness thesis" by evaluating how DT traits relate to victimization, offending, and substance use while controlling for self-control. Ultimately, they found that the constellation of dark personality traits were associated with crime and concluded that they were meaningful constructs to incorporate into future criminological studies. Further studies have examined specific traits within the DT in varying proximity to offending behavior. Many studies have identified psychopathy as a more robust determinant of violent offending (McCuish et al., 2014;

Baskin-Sommers & Baskin, 2016). Machiavellianism and narcissism were more predictive of non-violent offense such as substance misuse and theft. (Furnham et al., 2013). “D” has not been heavily studied within the context of offending behavior. Majority of research focused on comparing its operationalization to the Dark Triad but its demonstrated utility suggests it could also have a significant relationship to offending propensity.

### **The Current Study**

Given the well-established but nuanced relation between exposure to violence and offending behavior, the current study seeks to understand the mediating role of dark personality. I also test the “Dark Triad” against the “Dark Core” using a longitudinal study of youth offenders. Based on its established relationship with offending, I expect the DT to provide best fit to the data. In addition to testing the comparative fit of both models, I build on current research by testing the mediating role of dark personality traits in the relation between exposure to violence and offending behavior. I hypothesize that dark personality traits will mediate the relationship between exposure to violence and violent and nonviolent offending. If supported, these mediation models could provide an explanation of the pernicious relationship between exposure to violence and offending in addition to informing rehabilitation protocol for justice-involved youth with a history of violence exposure.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

I utilized publicly available data from the Pathways to Desistance Study (Schubert et al., 2004). A majority of participants from this longitudinal study of 1,354 youth offenders from two locales (Maricopa County, Arizona; Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania) were male (86.4%) and



between ages 14 and 17 ( $M_{age} = 16.20$  at baseline). Participants' ethnicities were coded as African-American (41.5%), Hispanic (33.5%), White (20.3%), and Other (4.7%).

After removing outliers on study variables using Grubb's (1969) test for outliers ( $N = 8$ ), there were a total of 1,346 participants included in the subsequent analyses. Each participant had at least one prior guilty conviction of at least one offense. After enrollment, researchers conducted in-depth interviews to assess multiple factors related to development, risk assessment, antisocial behavior, mental health, and recidivism over a seven-year period. Follow-up interviews occurred at 10 time points after baseline: 6 months (wave 1), 12 months (wave 2), 18 months (wave 3), 24 (wave 4), 30 months (wave 5), 36 months (wave 6), 48 months (wave 7), 60 months (wave 8), 72 months (wave 9), and 84 months (wave 10) after baseline. Additional information on data collection and study design can be found in Schubert et al. (2004) and Mulvey and Schubert (2012).

## **Measures**

The researchers who collected the data utilized several measures to assess various constructs included in the Pathways to Desistance Study.

### ***Exposure to Violence***

To measure the amount of violent experiences participants had experienced, a modified version of the Exposure to Violence Inventory (ETV), which assesses both violent victimization and witnessed violence, was completed by participants (Selner-O'Hagan et al., 1998). Questions included whether the respondent had witnessed or experienced events such as rape or a beating. The incidences of violent victimization and witnessed violence between baseline and wave 9 was calculated to determine the amount of violent incidents participants had

experienced prior to participant's personality at wave 9<sup>1</sup>. Scores were standardized before use in analyses.

### ***Dark Personality***

The Dark Triad of Personality includes the broad constructs of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. While the original study did not include the DT measurement scales, the subscales within the instruments used were components of these larger constructs. The same subscales were, individually, standardized and combined to determine a mean sum for the Dark Core conceptualization "D".

**Narcissism.** Narcissism was measured using the grandiosity subscale from the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI) and the egocentricity subscale of Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI).

**Grandiosity.** The grandiosity subscale of the YPI consists of 5 items (e.g., "I'm better than everyone on almost everything") to which participants respond on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Does not apply at all" to "Applies very well" (wave 9,  $\alpha = .65$ ).

**Egocentricity.** The egocentricity subscale of the PAI is a raw sum score of 8 items that inquire about self-interests such as exploitative behaviors in relationships<sup>2</sup>.

**Machiavellianism.** Machiavellianism was measured using the moral disengagement subscale of the Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement questionnaire, the manipulation subscale of the YPI, the consideration of others subscale of the Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (WAI), and the dishonest charm subscale of the YPI.

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<sup>1</sup> Reported  $\alpha$ = baseline: .67; 6 months: .75; 12 months: .74; 18 months: .75; 24 months: .75

<sup>2</sup> Alphas not reported

**Moral Disengagement.** The 32-item Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement questionnaire was used to assess adolescent's attitudes toward the treatment of others (e.g. "Some people deserve to be treated like animals."). The overall moral disengagement score was a mean of all the items endorsed by participants <sup>3</sup>(Bandura et al., 1996).

**Manipulation.** The manipulation subscale of the YPI consists of 5 items (e.g., "To get people to do what I want, I often find it efficient to con them.") to measure manipulativeness. Participants responded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Does not apply at all" to "Applies very well" (wave 9,  $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Consideration of Others.** The consideration of others subscale of the WAI was used to assess socio-emotional development within the context of external constraints (e.g., "Doing things to help other people is more important to me than almost anything else".) and participants rank from 1 to 5 (1= *False* to 5= *True*) how much their behavior in the past six months matches these statements. <sup>4</sup> (WAI; Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990). We reverse coded this variable to align it with the other variable scales.

**Dishonest Charm.** The dishonest charm subscale of the YPI consists of 5 items (e.g., "It's easy for me to charm and seduce others to get what I want from them") to which participants respond on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Does not apply at all" to "Applies very well" (wave 9,  $\alpha = .84$ ).

**Psychopathy.** Researchers included a comprehensive measure of psychopathy from the YPI total score (wave 9,  $\alpha=.94$ ). This was a sum score of all endorsed items from the 50-item questionnaire (e.g. "I think that crying is a sign of weakness, even if no one sees you").

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<sup>3</sup>  $\alpha$ = baseline: .88; 6 months: .90; 12 months: .91; 18 months: .92; 24 months: .92

<sup>4</sup>  $\alpha$ = baseline: .78, 6 months: .76; 12 months: .72; 18 months: .77; 24 months: .73

### ***Offending***

Participants completed a 24-item Self-Report of Offending with income offenses and aggressive offenses categorized.

**Violent Offending.** A cumulative frequency of violent offenses was determined by calculating a sum score of endorsed “aggressive offenses” (e.g., “killed someone”, “forced someone to have sex”) from every wave of the study.

**Nonviolent Offending.** A cumulative frequency of nonviolent offenses was determined by calculating a sum score of endorsed “income offenses” (e.g. “Sold other illegal drugs (cocaine, crack, heroine)?”, “Used checks or credit cards illegally”).

### ***Control Variables***

Race (categorized by original researchers as White, Black, Hispanic, or Other) and biological sex (male or female) are established criminogenic risk factors. They were included in the model to control for their respective influences on offending (DeLisi & Vaughn, 2015; Piquero, 2015).

### ***Analysis Plan***

I conducted preliminary confirmatory factor analyses comparing the fit of the “Dark Core” model and Dark Triad model of personality using the Analysis of Momentary Structure software (AMOS SPSS). Primary mediation pathway analyses were conducted in SPSS using the PROCESS macro extension (Hayes, 2017). I tested two mediational models: The first evaluated the relationship between exposure to violence and violent offending as mediated by dark personality traits. The second model evaluated the relationship between exposure to violence and income offending as mediated by dark personality traits.

## Results

### Preliminary Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Before testing the mediating effect of dark personality in the relation between exposure to violence and violent offending, I conducted two confirmatory factor analyses to elucidate the nature of dark personality within the sample. The first evaluated the dark personality variables loading onto their associated latent “Dark Triad” constructs (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy). The second model analyzed all dark personality variables loading onto one latent construct (Dark Core). All variables were correlated with each other.

Fit indices of Model 1 (DT) indicated a poor to moderately acceptable model fit ( $\chi^2$  (12,  $N = 1,354$ ) = 225.23,  $p < .001$ ,  $RMSEA = .135$ ,  $CFI = .929$ ,  $RFI = .852$ ,  $NFI = .926$ ,  $IFI = .929$ ,  $TLI = .857$ ). As seen in *Figure 1*, Acceptable factor loadings (greater than or equal to .4) on multiple factors for all items with the exception of *consideration of others* (.23) provided acceptable factor loadings (greater than or equal to .4). Similarly, Model 2 (“D”) yielded poor to moderately acceptable fit indices ( $\chi^2$  (14,  $N = 1,354$ ) = 319.37,  $p < .001$ ,  $RMSEA = .125$ ,  $CFI = .948$ ,  $NFI = .945$ ,  $RFI = .873$ ,  $IFI = .948$ ,  $TLI = .878$ ). As *Figure 2* illustrates, there were acceptable loadings across all observed indicators except, again, for *consideration of others* (factor loading). Since the “D” model fit slightly better (and more parsimoniously) than the DT model, I used that conceptualization for my study by creating a standardized mean sum of each individual dark personality trait measure.

### Mediation Analyses

To investigate the mediating effect of the dark personality on the relation between exposure to violence and violent offending, I conducted a simple mediation analysis using Hayes

PROCESS macro extension in SPSS (model 4; Preacher & Hayes, 2004). After controlling for race and gender, results indicated that the direct effect of exposure to violence on violent offending was significant ( $b = 2.94$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Exposure to violence and the dark personality were also significantly positively associated ( $b = 0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.002$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, dark personality and violent offending had a significant positive relationship ( $b = 11.54$ ,  $SE = 3.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, the indirect effect of the dark personality on violent offending was statistically significant ( $b = 0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ , 95% *C.I.* = 0.08 - 0.41, see *Figure 3*). The overall model had a small effect size (.03) as evidenced by the completely standardized indirect effect.

To investigate the mediating effect of dark personality on the relationship between exposure to violence and nonviolent offending, I conducted another simple mediation analysis. After controlling for race and gender, results indicated that the direct effect of exposure to violence on nonviolent offending was significant ( $b = 26.92$ ,  $SE = 2.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Exposure to violence and dark personality were also significantly positively associated with each other ( $b = 0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, the dark core of personality and nonviolent offending had a significant positive relationship ( $b = 110.09$ ,  $SE = 32.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, the indirect effect of dark personality on nonviolent offending was statistically significant ( $b = 2.03$ ,  $SE = 0.90$ , 95% *C.I.* = 0.47-4.01, see *Figure 4*). The overall model had a small effect size (.03) as evidenced by the completely standardized indirect effect.

## Discussion

I investigated the mediating role of dark personality in exposure to violence's relationship with both violent and nonviolent offending, respectively. As a preliminary analysis, I also conducted confirmatory factor analyses to better understand dark personality traits and

compare the model fit of the “Dark Core” and “Dark Triad” operationalizations. After reviewing model fit indices, both the “D” and DT models yielded poor to moderate fit indices, suggesting neither conceptualization was especially favorable for the dataset over another. As the “Dark Core” conceptualization fitted the data slightly better and more parsimoniously, I tested the “D” operationalization of dark personality as a mediator in the relationship between exposure to violence and both types of offending.

Results of the primary analyses, particularly the specific pathways modeled, suggest that exposure to violence predicts these maladaptive personality traits that, in turn, predict offending. Temporally, this relationship demonstrates that the manifestation of dark personality is preceded and predicted by exposure to violence. The presence of these traits then increases the likelihood of youth offender’s criminality, violent or nonviolent. This newfound association highlights the nuanced influences of early traumatic experiences on personality development in youth and their offending propensity long-term. While exposure to violence had a significant direct effect on offending, dark personality, a more proximal determinant, is one factor that explains that relationship.

Much of previous literature regarding the conceptualization of dark personality has been mixed (Bertl et al., 2017; Moshagen et al., 2018; Vize et al., 2020). Recent research has questioned the comparative utility of the “Dark Triad” or “D” model. Results of my confirmatory factor analyses revealed that both interpretations had poor to moderate fit, despite “D” fitting slightly but not significantly better than the DT. These findings only further contribute to the inability to definitively ascertain the more accurate conceptualization. However, reliance on

approximate measures of the DT rather than empirical measures limits the strength of its conceptualization in our study.

The majority of prior research focuses solely on various components of the overall mediation models presented in my study. In response to traumatic events, maladaptive personality traits have been reported. Dark personality traits have been especially linked to various forms of offending. Any form of early childhood trauma is a well-established predictor of offending and prevalent with the juvenile offender population. My study presents an amalgam of these prior associations by establishing a succinct model distinguishing the effects of early trauma on proximal determinants of offending.

### **Limitations**

A major limitation of my research is that the original dataset did not use any intentional measures of the “Dark Triad”, aside from psychopathy. Instead, subscales of the available measures in the dataset that are approximate constituents of the DT traits were utilized. This may have dually influenced the results of our preliminary confirmatory factor analysis and limited my ability to test the DT construct regardless of its indicated model fit. The resulting extraneous variance from using these approximations limits the strength to succinctly conceptualize dark personality.

Additionally, my study utilized a self-report measure of both offending types. Self-report scales are especially likely to be impacted by social desirability or response bias when the target behaviors are illegal. The nonviolent offending variable also encompassed a wide variety of income-related offenses (property crime, distribution of illicit drugs, etc.) especially common in



juveniles (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2019). There could have also been some under or overreporting of offenses which could impact the accuracy of our variables.

There are also several limitations due to data collection procedures. Temporally, the majority of the dark personality variables were only collected at wave 10, limiting my ability to make any comparative conclusions about participants' personality prior to violence exposure. Participants were also in different environments (e.g. residential facility or home) which may have impacted the amount of violence they experienced, their responses to personality- related questionnaires, and their morale at the time of these interviews. Participants were also already criminally-involved upon entering the study, hindering our ability to make any preemptive conclusions about their prior experiences.

### **Implications**

A model of this nature has multiple implications for youth offender rehabilitation. Having found exposure to violence to predict dark personality and, in turn, offending, impacts how the proceeding symptoms of trauma and its more nuanced influence on personality traits are conceptualized. Upon entry into the criminal justice system both trauma and, concurrently, personality characteristics should be assessed to evaluate the possibility of these dark personality traits being especially abundant. Upon recognition of these issues youth offenders should be provided treatment for these issues as part of their trauma rehabilitation, to address these issues and promote desistance. Identifying a history of exposure to violence increases the likelihood that a dark personality also exists, the treatment of which could shift the trajectory of a person's life. Dialectical behavioral therapy may prove a beneficial approach as it has been adapted to assist in the treatment of complex trauma-related issues (Wagner et al., 2007;

Visdómine-Lozano, 2020). Additionally, the significant correlation of dark personality to both types of offending asserts that these screening practices should be upheld regardless of offending severity.

In regard to how best to operationalize dark personality, finding that neither the “Dark Triad” or “D” adequately fit the data, posits that dark personality may manifest differently in youth. Majority of research on dark personality utilized adult samples in its initial development and proceeding assessment, which may not be generalizable to younger individuals. Perhaps evaluating the prevalence of negative personality traits among youth offenders and subclinical youth populations could distinguish specific traits outside of the “DT” or “D” conceptualizations.

Ultimately, while society prioritizes minimizing criminal offenses, research illustrates the importance of understanding these more distal factors that are associated with offending. Based on my study, it is evident how important reducing incidences of exposure to violence is. While it is difficult to prevent exposure to violence outside of the legal system, every attempt should be made to ensure the juvenile justice system does not initiate trauma or retraumatize youth offenders as this only increases their risk of reoffending. Baetz et al., 2019 noted how their implementation of a trauma-informed intervention in juvenile detention facilities led to a significant reduction of violent episodes within these facilities. These results substantiate how impactful trauma is on conferring offending risk. An environment purposed for offender rehabilitation should not be a breeding ground for trauma exposure.

### **Future Research**

My study provides several directions for future research. Due to the lack of substantive “Dark Triad” measures within the original study, future studies should implement empirically

supported DT measures to better grasp its manifestation within youth offender populations. By doing so, a similar confirmatory analysis procedure should elucidate the comparable significance of the “D” and DT within youth offenders more accurately. Specifying which constituents of dark personality are more indicative of future offending risk can help determine what to evaluate when conducting risk assessments of youth offenders.

Due to trauma’s established influence on offending, more research should explore and evaluate the differential impact of specific forms of trauma. While my study specifically evaluated exposure to violence, trauma can occur in a variety of other forms that may impact offending behavior in a different or similar way. Shifting research towards specific forms of trauma will then inform the use of targeted treatment interventions to address experienced trauma and distinguish its influence on more proximal factors such as personality.

## **Conclusion**

Juvenile offending remains a defining issue in American society. Increasing desistance necessitates understanding of factors that influence their adjustment and offending behavior. My study’s emphasis on exposure to violence as a traumatic experience predisposing the onset of dark personality traits addresses how distal incidences can impact youth’s offending propensity more proximally. Identifying this relationship insights further research on how specific forms of trauma influences youth offenders in different ways. Recognizing dark personality as the mediator between exposure to violence and offending elucidates the potential utility of targeting maladaptive personality when attempting to increase desistance, rehabilitate, and assess risk of offending in youth.

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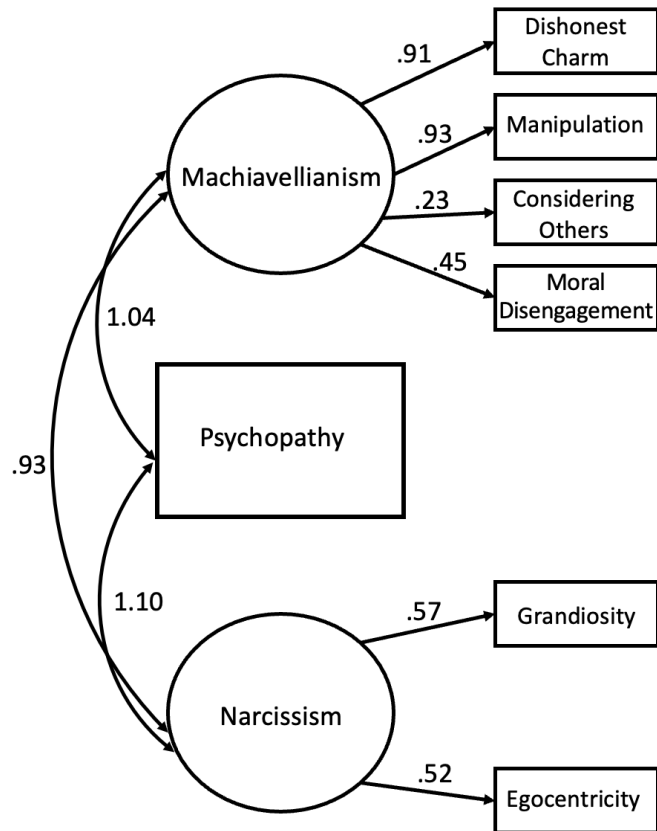
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**Table 1***Bivariate correlations between main study variables (N = 1,224).*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. ETV	1						14.65	10.30
2. Dark Core	.28**	1						
3. Nonviolent Offending	.43**	.23**	1				354.24	727.61
4. Violent Offending	.37**	.21**	.38**	1			37.10	84.61
5. White	-.08**	.06*	.00	.07*	1			
6. Male	.13**	.08**	.12**	.09**	-.06*	1		

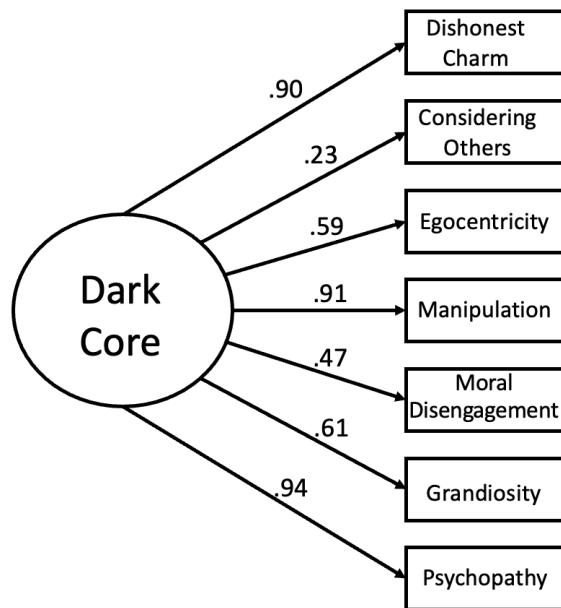
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Figure 1***Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Dark Triad (Model 1)*

Note. All observed variables and factor loadings are standardized.

**Figure 2**

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Single Dark Core of Personality (Model 2).*

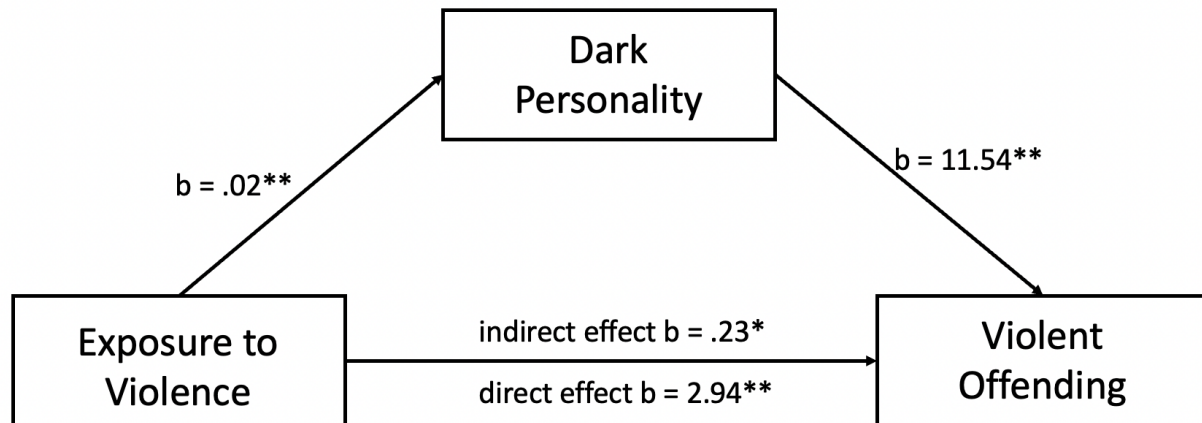


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Note. All variables and factor loadings are standardized.

**Figure 3**

*Mediating effect of dark personality on the relation between exposure to violence and violent offending.*

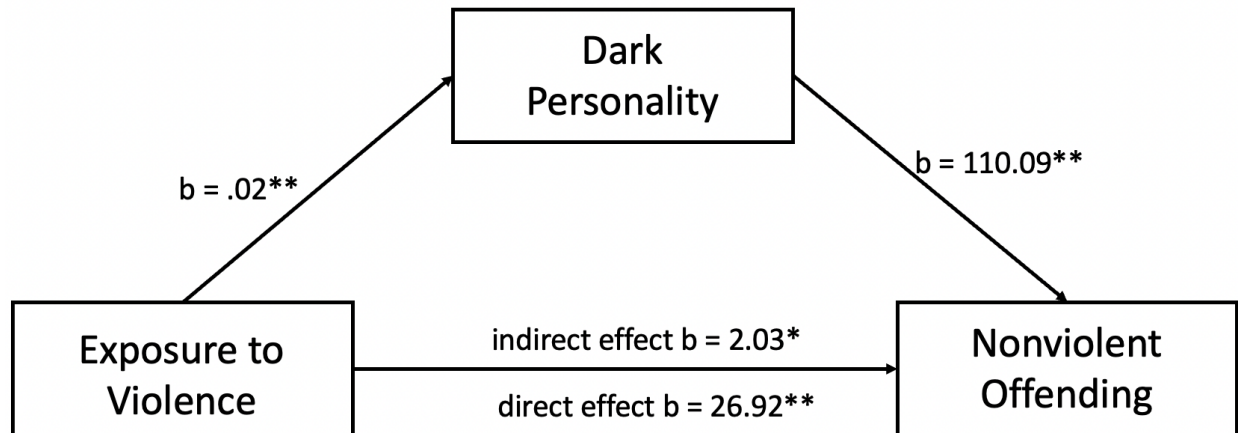


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Note.  $^*p < .05$ .  $^{**}p < .01$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients reported.

**Figure 4**

*Mediating effect of dark personality on the relation between exposure to violence and nonviolent offending.*



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Note.  $^*p < .05$ .  $^{**}p < .01$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients reported.